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Poetry and Making Books in the Library

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POETRY AND MAKING BOOKS IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

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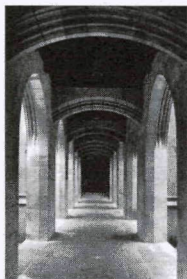
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Educators and psychologists have demonstrated the importance of involving learners physically, emotionally, and experientially, as well as academically in their learning. Vygotsky was a pioneer in demonstrating the importance of socialization as a vital component of learning. Vygotsky proposed that there is a zone of proximal development in which the learner is ready to learn but must receive support in both social and academic contexts. Rasinski described such support as scaffolding, wherein the learner moves from dependence on the leader/teacher to independence.

Following Vygotsky's lead, Bandura strongly advocated the importance of social acceptance and creating a self-image as a successful learner. The work of Vygotsky, Bandura, and others of like mind has provided the foundation for the constructivist movement in education with its emphasis on learners as creators. The constructivists have argued that learning and developing the whole person in schools is just as important as learning information and skills and that, as Morrison and Wilcox determined, students "create understanding and meaning based on their experiences and ideas" (334). In addition, the work of Gardner powerfully demonstrates the need for involving as many modes of intelligence as

can be integrated into the learning environment.

Parkay and Stanford, based primarily on the work of Swiss biologist and social scientist Jean Piaget, determined that children learn most effectively and efficiently by engaging in physical, social, and academic activity within their environments. Children need

to be physically and mentally active rather than passive learners. Piaget's work also suggested to these researchers that activity involves not only physical manipulation but also fosters mental action that transforms into creating new, exciting, and permanent learning. In this light, Csikszentmihalyi proposed that when a learner enjoys what he or she is doing and is encouraged to do it, "focusing the mind becomes effortless" (27). Further, Peterson determined that positive emotional climates foster "broader attention, greater working memory, enhanced verbal fluency, and increased openness to information" (58). In this light, extensive review of the research led Lapp, Flood, and Moore to suggest that "instruction must be multisensory with learning opportunities that rely on all of the senses, and it must be scaffolded for each student's learning differences" (538).

Working together in producing books and practicing poems in choral and shared reading formats in the school library is especially advantageous for encouraging development of a sense of community. In this light, Au determined that creating such family-like learning environments is worthwhile for all learners and may be especially "beneficial to the literacy learning of many children of diverse backgrounds" (40). In addition, an extensive review of research led Flippo to infer that repeated readings of text in an engaging environment fosters development of comprehension through intrinsic development of "metacognitive awareness" (262). In addition, Brown and Kappes concluded that repeated readings of interesting text with accompanying discussions can lead to deep comprehension, often referred to in the research literature as "close reading" (2).

Poetry provides a useful source of interesting texts, and the school library is a perfect place



Fig. 1. Ethan prepares to punch out a book cover using the comb-binding machine.

for making books of poems that can enable repeated reading. Students in the primary, intermediate, and middle grades usually visit the school library for one 50-minute period each week. The library is often a refuge for students from a highly task-oriented classroom. In addition, substantial quantities of the materials needed for making the books described herein can be easily stored in the library and made available to all of the students. Consequently, all of the children produce a book. The librarian can collaborate with classroom teachers who engage in additional work on reading fluency with their students. We encourage students and their teachers to practice reading poems from their books and eventually perform poetry readings for an appreciative audience. In addition, we sometimes record the readings and produce CDs with attractive labels produced with label making materials such as those produced by Memorex and Avery. A small digital voice recorder, such as the Olympus WS-400S that has a built-in USB jack, works very well.

MAKING COMB-BOUND BOOKS

We have found that making comb-bound books is an enjoyable multisensory approach for experientially involving children in their learning in a productive manner. The ideas presented below engage the theories of the researchers presented above in practical classroom activities. We will first present information concerning construction of comb-bound books. Countless opportunities exist to apply the strategies in a variety of learning environments.

Materials:

1. A comb-binding machine such as the Ibico Kombo provides the means for binding the books. We have found that while many schools have a binding machine of this type, the machines are rarely used except for occasional reports. Comb-binding machines are available at office supply stores such as Office

Max and Office Depot. When purchasing a comb-binder we recommend a sturdy machine capable of easily punching through mat board. We suggest keeping the machine on a rolling cart for ease of transport, since many of them are heavy. On the other hand, avoid machines that use spiral

bindings because they usually lack the capacity to produce the books described herein. We keep the comb-binding machine in the school library and make it available when needed by others (see fig. 1).

2. Plastic combs used for binding are available at office supply stores. (We have also found that there are often large supplies of them in school storage closets.) We cut the 11-inch combs into sections of six comb rings for the project described. The half-inch comb size works well. The standard-sized combs contain nineteen binding rings; however, be sure that the combs are compatible with your comb-binding machine (see fig. 2).

3. Make pages for the books from 110-lb. or 67-lb. cardstock. Regular-weight copy paper (24-lb.) is too flimsy for making durable pages. Start by cutting one inch off the top with a paper cutter, making the paper 10" x 8.5". Next, cut the pages into fourths (4.25" x 5") using a paper cutter. This will give you four pages per sheet. Now, line up the pages on the comb-binding machine so that you can punch six holes. There are guide marks on the comb-binding machine that can be used to designate where to punch the six holes, or you can designate your own with a sticker(s). On the other hand, when producing a class book of poems we increase the size, using larger covers (9" x 6") and pages (8" x 5.5").

4. Cut mat board 5.5" x 4.5" using a sturdy paper cutter. We get a plentiful supply of colorful scrap mat board free from frame shops. Framers punch out an interior piece of the mat board to frame a picture, while the interior piece is often left for scrap. It is easy to make front and back matching covers. Punch six holes in the mat board. When punching the front cover and the back cover, be sure to reverse the punching procedure for each cover so they will match perfectly when aligned. That is, punch the front cover with the colorful side facing upward, and the back cover with the colorful side facing downward. The placement of the mat board on the comb-binding machine will be slightly different from placement for the pages because the mat board is a little larger. This adjustment can easily be made.

5. We like to make nameplates for our students. For example, using impressive-looking bond paper we affix the typed name of each student and the title of the book – in this

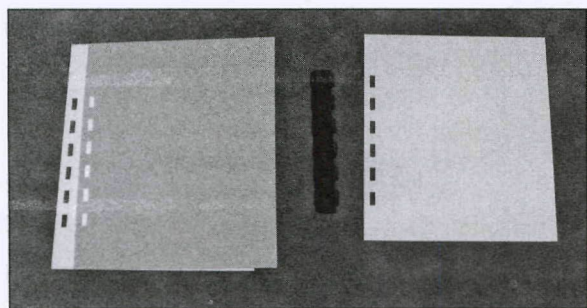


Fig. 2. Basic materials for making comb-bound books: Covers, comb, and page.

activity, *My Book of Poems*. We make one set of nameplates (1.5" x 2.0" when cut out) that can easily be modified for many different titles. We use the "Replace" option on Microsoft Word to make a new set of nameplates. The professional-looking nameplate is very impressive, easy to create, and encourages students to treasure the books they make even more. We also make nameplate frames (approximately 2" x 3") from construction paper and cut pieces of clear plastic adhesive such as ConTact to cover the nameplate frames (see fig. 3).

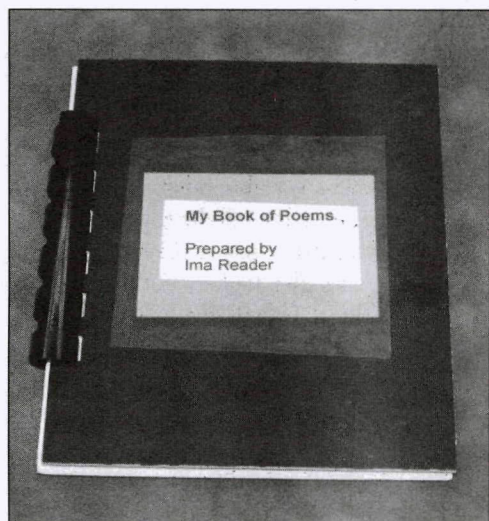


Fig. 3. Completed comb-bound book.

CONSTRUCTING THE BOOK OF POEMS

1. Prepare a set of typed poems that will fit comfortably on the pages. We put each poem in a box on the page to make it easier for children to cut out. We have a collection of fifteen short poems from which the students can choose to add to their book of poems, including poems by Jack Prelutsky, Shel Silverstein, and Rachel Field. Limericks are also popular with our students. In addition, Lukens, Smith, and Coffel developed "Textsets" (277-281) with numerous resources for building a collection of enjoyable poems.

2. Provide materials for the students: a poem collection, glue sticks, construction paper for frames for the poems on the pages, scissors, ten blank pages, front and back covers, personalized nameplate, six-ring comb, and whatever else you would like to add.

3. Provide a model for the students to see how the finished product will look. We like to add a picture of the student to mount on the inside of the front cover. This is not essential, but adds an even more profound personal touch to the book. In addition, we encourage production of a comb-bound book each year, with a current photograph of the child on the inside cover. On the other hand, we are always cautious about photographing students, and are careful to determine if placing a photograph of a child on the inside cover is permissible.

4. Invite the students to cut out poems they like from the collection provided, make a frame for the poem out of construction paper, and affix the poems and frames to the pages

using a glue stick. Sometimes we invite the students to place a poem they like on a page, while leaving the page to the left blank, so that they can add their own illustration to go with the poem.

5. We encourage the students to write a "wonderful" poem themselves. The idea of the "wonderful" poem came to us from a colleague who observed this strategy being used successfully with young children in Australia. The "wonderful" poem is always in the following format:

Dogs, Wonderful Dogs

By Pat Poet

Dogs, wonderful dogs,
Playful, friendly, loyal,
Fetchers, stretchers, chewers,
Greeters, barkers, runners,
Friends forever,
Dogs, Wonderful Dogs

The students all eventually add their "wonderful" poems to their own book of poems and also place a copy of their poems on a bulletin board. In addition, we produce a 9" x 6" comb-bound book of poems containing all of the "wonderful" poems produced by the members of the class. However, we provide support so that all of the original "wonderful" poems are typed and look professional.

Not only do students enjoy producing the book of poems, but we use the poems to foster reading fluency. For example, we like the coffee shop strategy (Rasinski), in which the students work on a favorite poem and present it to the class while sitting in the poet's chair. Meanwhile, the audience is enjoying hot chocolate or another drink prepared in cups with lids similar to those they would use in places like Starbucks. The coffee shop is usually a cooperative effort between the classroom teacher and the school librarian.

In addition, we occasionally invite the students to select a favorite poem from their book to record on a CD. The students practice their poem and when they and their reading coach determine they are ready, they record. The reading coach can be an older student, teacher, instructional assistant, or parent volunteer. An inexpensive digital recorder, such as the Olympus WS-311M, works very well. We put about twelve poems on a CD, with each poem on a new track.

Using a separate track for each recording is important for locating the poems and, if a reader needs to start over, only the new track needs to be erased. We make a professional-looking label with the name of the class. Label maker programs such as those produced by Memorex and Avery are easy to use and inexpensive. We like to use the CD format because the physical product appeals to students more than just recording on the computer and making an MP3 file.

Producing a book of poems is a very enjoyable and academically sound undertaking. In addition, the strategies presented are highly complementary to the Common Core State Standards (www.corestandards.com).

In this age of high-stakes testing, schools devote a great deal of time to test preparation, and focus on skills-oriented activities that are often dull and tedious (International Reading

Association, 2). On the other hand, we have found reading competencies can be greatly fostered through exciting activities such as making comb-bound books. As described earlier, this learning strategy goes beyond pedagogy to basic human desires to do interesting and meaningful things. We have also found that making comb-bound books is a great subject for a teacher/librarian workshop.

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